



NORTH LONDON CARES

**WINTER WELLBEING
2019/20 EVALUATION REPORT**



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1. Introduction and objectives

In 2019, loneliness moved some way up the public agenda. The appointment of the government's first Minister for Loneliness in the previous year led to the launch of the 'Let's Talk Loneliness' campaign, and the epidemic of loneliness began to be more widely acknowledged in the public. Cities, in particular, showed themselves to be



amongst the loneliest environments – a trend that was highlighted even more with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic which deeply affected those in dense housing, without gardens or access to broad or deep social networks and who lived alone.

Camden and Islington are home to over 50,000 people aged 65 or over, with a big proportion of those over the age of 80. More than half live alone, and many live in social housing and income deprivation – four of the biggest determinants of loneliness. Sadly, this problem appears to be worsening, with segregation across the generations now amongst the highest in the world and Covid-19 further keeping people apart.

Notwithstanding the pandemic, in Camden alone it is predicted that by 2031 there will be over 38,000 people aged 65 and over living in the borough – an increase of 38% over a generation. The risk of isolation, loneliness and disconnection is further exacerbated by the nature of city life: our boroughs are ever-changing, with a population churn of around a quarter every year in Camden and Islington.

For our older neighbours, this lack of opportunity to connect continues to be a challenge across the winter months. Cold weather isolates. It brings with it illness and weakened immune systems resulting in hospital stays for many, often followed by a return home to large bills and choices between food and heating. These anxieties, coupled with the risk of falls, icy pavements and long, dark nights can mean older neighbours can quickly reach new depths of loneliness – unable to access the essential connections they need to support wellbeing and purpose.

North London Cares has been tackling the plight of loneliness for nine years now. We do this by connecting with around 1,500 potentially isolated older neighbours every year, hosting up to 25 Social Clubs a month, and supporting over 200 people to enjoy one-to-one Love Your Neighbour friendships across the generations. We

believe in the power of intergenerational friendships to tackle isolation for older and younger people alike; it's no surprise to us that loneliness amongst people under 30 has been shown over recent years to be as big a problem as it is for older people.

Now in its ninth year, Winter Wellbeing is the charity's seasonal project. It's a direct response to the strenuous mental and physical challenges faced by older people during the most isolating months.

The aim is to keep older neighbours warm, active, healthy and connected. Our key objectives for the project this year were to:

- Ensure older neighbours stayed warm at home through preventative activities targeting fuel poverty;
- Help keep older people informed about local health, housing and benefits services and other provisions;
- Connect people to North London Cares' broader social programmes and networks as well as to other local services and activities provided by the public and voluntary sectors.

To fulfil these objectives, North London Cares offered:

- A door-knocking campaign, in partnership with Camden and Islington Councils, targeting older neighbours over the age of 65 in areas of known high deprivation and loneliness;
- Warm items such as blankets, hot water bottles, socks, gloves, hats, hand warmers and thermos flasks;
- Small grants of up to £100 for neighbours struggling with bills and poverty;
- Referrals to fuel poverty services such as WISH+ at Camden Council and SHINE at Islington Council for advice and support on keeping warm at home, for instance through draught-proofing and insulation tips, and by helping people to understand bills and payments;
- Direct signposting to organisations offering advice and support in the areas of health, transport, social services, financial support, housing, practical support, mental health and social connections;

further 400 letters were sent to older neighbours in Camden and Islington, with the offer of a home visit or phone call from North London Cares.

Door-knocking was always conducted in pairs by North London Cares' staff Outreach colleagues who carry identification badges and a copy of the Winter Wellbeing flyer and letter, to help older neighbours recall the previous correspondence and alleviate nerves about our validity.

We knocked on an average of 30 doors a day, and only ever in daylight hours. If an older neighbour wasn't at home or didn't answer, we posted a calling card and leaflet through the door, with the offer of another visit.

We had hundreds of conversations on doorsteps and in living rooms, with neighbours who we helped but also many who didn't need our support, but were grateful to us for calling round. We take a personable and friendly approach to every relationship in the community, taking the time to truly listen to and appreciate the challenges neighbours are facing. The trust and rapport that we build with neighbours is vital in encouraging many to ask for deeper support, and by being invited across the threshold, we were able to see first hand issues with cold, damp and insulation.



Neighbours struggling with the cold were offered warm items, which were often a gateway to encouraging them to seek more support. Those with draughty or cold homes were offered referrals to WISH+ and SHINE; many in need of repairs were referred to housing teams. Those finding it difficult to pay heating bills or in need of larger warm items were assessed for small grants which could be used to pay for items such as heaters, duvets and food vouchers up to value £100.

Neighbours were also given advice on other needs, and signposting to local provisions including transport, health, housing and financial services. Many were connected with support from social services, as well as mental health services. Those craving social connections were given information about North London Cares' year-round programmatic

activities, including Social Clubs and one-to-one friendships with young Londoners, as well other local activities.

Those neighbours who were reluctant to seek further support upon our first meeting were given Winter Wellbeing packs, filled with advice about local services, healthy living and community companions.

“It is a very good project and you are helping people. You came to talk to me and help me, and I really appreciate it.”

Ballu, 76

2.2 Community outreach

Throughout the autumn, and during the first few weeks of the project, North London Cares' Outreach team worked hard to promote Winter Wellbeing in the community, before the colder weather hit. Community outreach has become an integral part of our delivery, connecting with GPs' surgeries, flu clinics, pharmacies, community halls, dances, tea parties, lunch clubs, tenants and residents' association meetings and lunches. Working in partnership means we are able to meet neighbours in an environment that is friendly and familiar to people, where the encouragement of centre managers, friends and facilitators means they are quickly put at ease to talk to us about the help they might need. This trust-building is a key part of Winter Wellbeing and the North London Cares model.

This year we also built new relationships with healthcare professionals. Presentations and 'Lunch and Learn' sessions at the Islington GPs' Forum meetings and Whittington Heath District Nurses Forum, and information going out in their newsletters, meant we built stronger referral pathways. We also dropped flyers off to a number of pharmacies in the community. We also continued our relationship with Partners Islington this year, who kindly donated towards the cost of warm items and featured the project in their newsletter.

Organisations we worked with throughout the project included:

- Islington Bangladeshi Association
- Henna Asian Women's group
- Partners Islington
- GoodGym
- Voluntary Action Islington
- Voluntary Action Camden
- Forum Plus

- Help On Your Doorstep
- Marchmont Community Centre
- Alzheimer's Association
- Whittington Park Community Centre
- SHINE – Islington Council
- WISH+ – Camden Council
- Islington Carers' Hub
- Scotscare
- Kingsgate Community Centre
- Camden Federation of Private Tenants
- Brickworks Community Centre
- Hilldrop Community Centre
- Ageing Better in Camden
- Camden Community Connectors
- MIND
- Camden Clinical Commissioning Group
- Jean Stokes Community Centre
- Andover Community Centre
- Manor Gardens
- Highbury Roundhouse
- Victim Support Rapid Response Unit
- St Luke's Church
- British Red Cross
- Stroke Association
- The Irish Centre
- Calling London

We also worked with the following GPs and pharmacies in Camden and Islington:

- Amptill Surgery
- Regent's Park practice
- Bloomsbury Surgery clinic
- John Walker chemist
- Boots pharmacy on Camden High Street and in the Brunswick Centre
- Medicine Box pharmacy
- Boots
- Museum Practice
- Brunswick Medical Centre
- River Place flu clinic
- The Miller Practice
- Savermain pharmacy
- Turnsbull chemist

Sheltered housing units also spread the message, including:

- Elsinore House
- Highbury View
- Denton
- Sycamore Court
- Nuffield
- Spring Court
- Gospel Oak Court
- Springfield Court
- Cleve Road
- Highgate Road
- Pennethorne House
- Greenwood

The North London Cares team also promoted the project within our own networks, sending the leaflet to over 1,000 older neighbours across our boroughs, multiple times throughout the project. Our Love Your Neighbour team, who manage our one-to-one friendships, were proactive in promoting the message to their matches too, speaking to older neighbours over the phone to see if they needed any additional support.



The Outreach team also attended the Hygge Social Clubs at Kentish Town Community Centre in November to talk about the help on offer, and organised a Winter Warmer event in December 2019 at the Goodinge Community Centre. We invited a number of community partners to present at the event: Alzheimer's Society, BETTER Sports, Camden Community Connectors, Islington Carers, Camden Carers, WISH + and SHINE.

3.0 Project in numbers

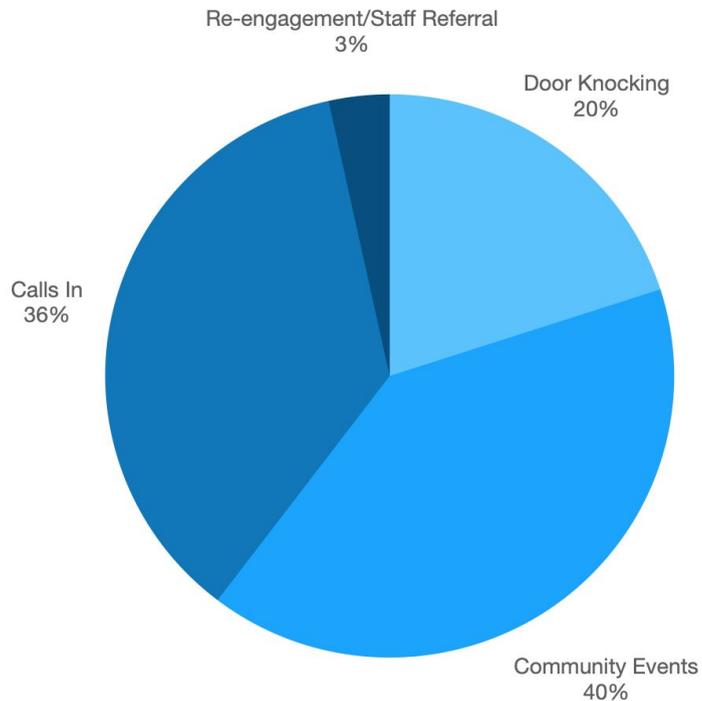
From October 2019 to March 2020, North London Cares:

- **Spoke to over 700 older neighbours** on doorsteps and at community events;
- **Knocked on 517 doors** in four months across both boroughs;
- **Connected 361 older people** for 845 referrals to community services, including North London Cares' own social programmes;
- **Delivered 342 warm items**, including blankets and thermal socks to older neighbours struggling with the cold;
- **Connected 54 people** to WISH + and SHINE for support with cold homes;
- **Gave 26 older neighbours small grants of up to £100** to help people most in need stay warm during the winter;
- **Spread the message** about Winter Wellbeing at 49 community events.

“The hot bottle you gave me helps with my back pain.”

Mavis, 79

Interventions by source



3.1 Door knocking

Door knocking accounted for 20% of all interventions this year.

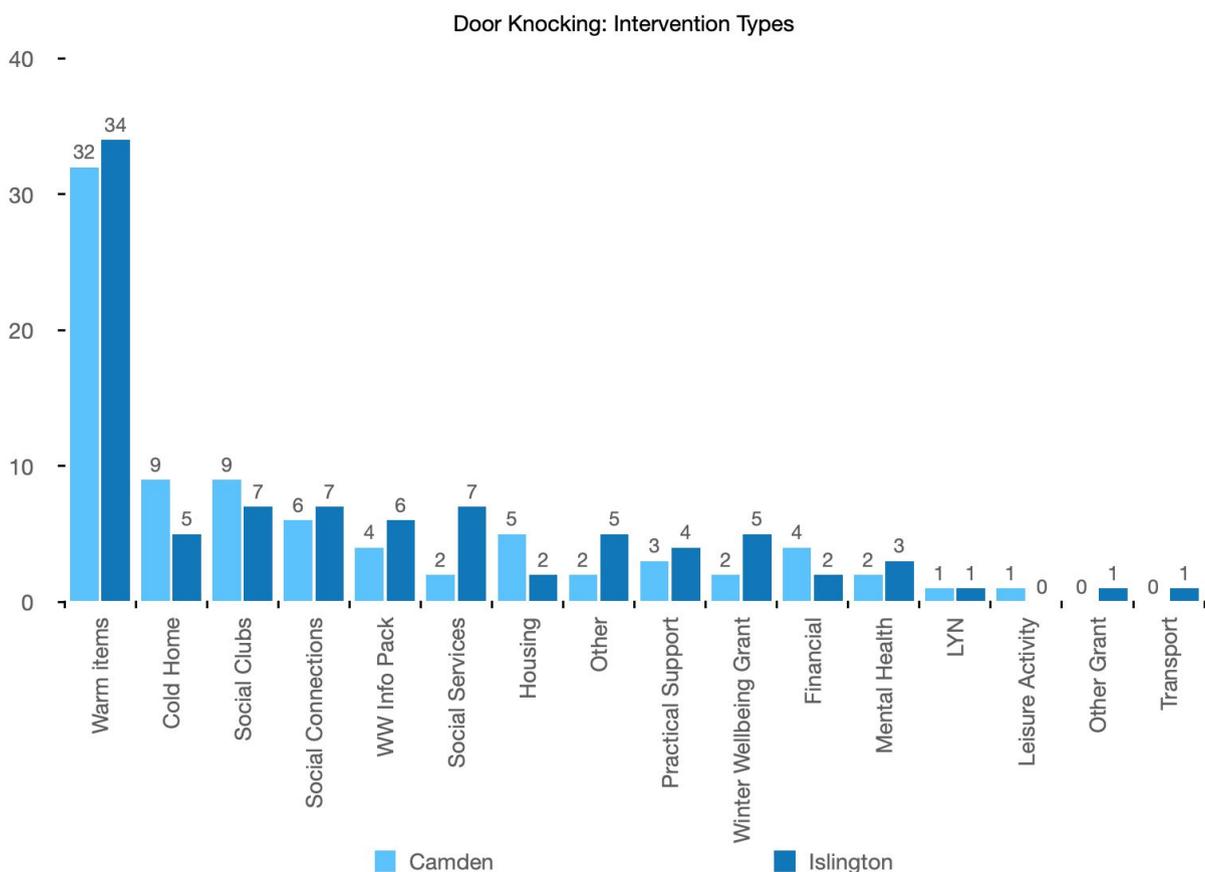
	Camden	Islington	Total
Doors Knocked	257	260	517
Neighbours receiving an interaction	123 (48%)	87 (33%)	210 (41%)
Neighbours receiving an intervention	39 (15%)	36 (14%)	75 (15%)
Total numbers of interventions	76	65	141

The vast majority of older neighbours we sent letters to welcomed our visit. Of the 300 older neighbours we wrote to in Camden, six people opted out. Of the 200 additional letters sent to neighbours in Camden, only one neighbour opted in. In Islington 11 people opted out, while 11 opted in. The opt-in letters did not have as powerful a result as we'd hoped, and we would like to consider sending out the leaflet next year, encouraging neighbours to call up for a chat, as opposed to booking in a visit, which could be a barrier to getting support.

Due to security gates, safeguarding concerns, broken buzzers and being turned away due to early fears around the Covid-19 outbreak, we were unable to access 83 addresses across both boroughs. Where possible, we posted leaflets through doors instead.

We successfully knocked on 14 more addresses this year than last year, but interactions were down by 110 conversations. The nature of door-knocking can be unpredictable, and often neighbours simply weren't home. The percentage of neighbours receiving an interaction dropped slightly, from 19% last year to 15% this year. This year there were more Sheltered Housing Units included in the data extracted by the council, which often meant these neighbours had fewer needs – their housing was already warm and they were well looked after.

Compared with last year, the number of interventions per neighbour increased. In 2018/19, 96 neighbours had 156 interventions (1.6 interventions per interaction); this year 75 neighbours received 141 offers of deeper support (1.88 interventions per interaction). The most common interventions were for warm items, followed by support for cold homes and referrals into our Social Clubs. Connections to social connections, social services and practical support were also popular this year.



“One of the things I have enjoyed about door-knocking is meeting and talking to people that are very lonely and don’t otherwise get many visitors. Even if we haven’t always supported them in any other way, these neighbours have appreciated it. I’ve been told on multiple occasions “to pop by again if I’m in the area”, that “it’s been lovely chatting” and to “stay in touch”. This shows the trust that can be built through informal local conversations issues otherwise considered to be formal. It adds value to people.”

Martha, Outreach Officer

3.2 Community events

Community events accounted for 40% of interventions this year – our highest source of interventions. Community events included: talks, visits to sheltered housing units, GP and flu clinics and attendance at coffee mornings.

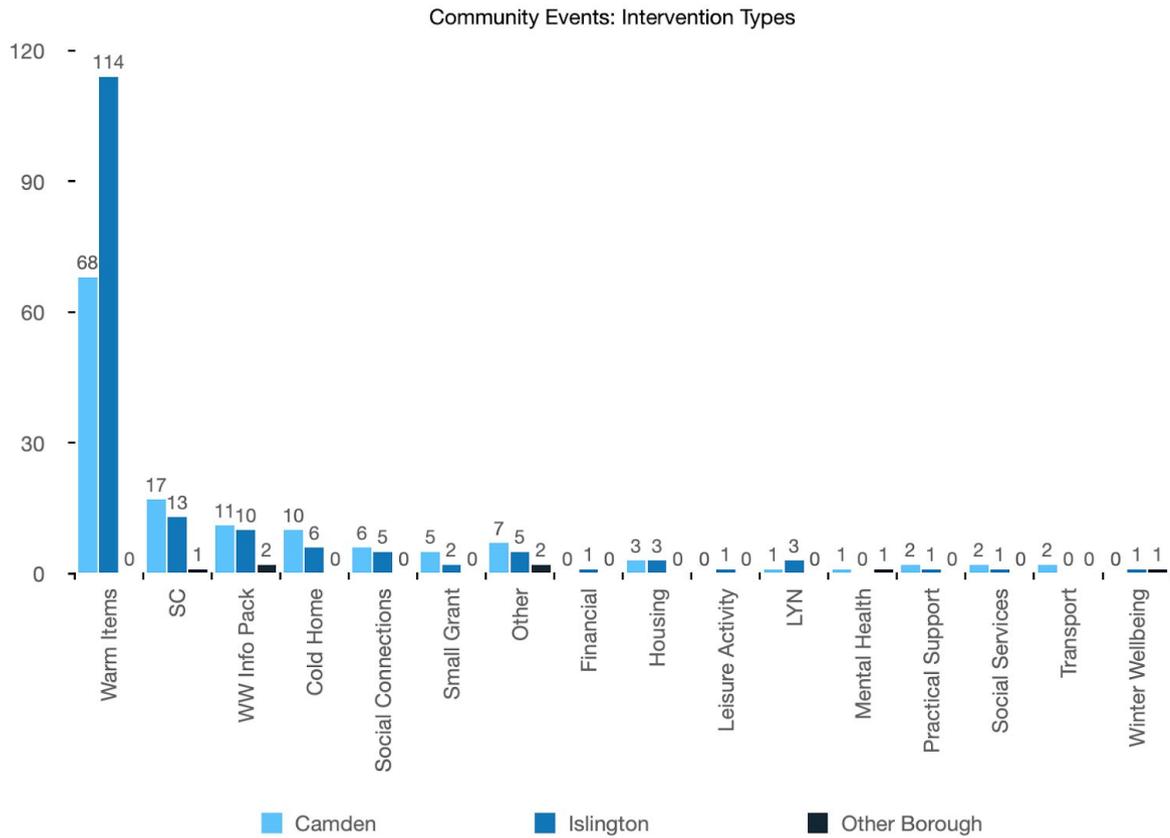
	Camden	Islington	Total
Number of community events attended	30	19	49
Leaflets delivered	456	852	1,308
Neighbours receiving an interaction	229	218	447
Neighbours receiving an intervention	57	73	130
Total numbers of interventions	149	155	304

In total the Winter Wellbeing team attended 49 community events this year. The breakdown of the interventions was:

- **6 visits to sheltered housing units** (additional to council data) were made resulting in 20 interventions;
- **20 sessions in GP surgeries**, pharmacies and flu clinics led to 31 interventions;

- **23 community events produced 253 interventions.**

Warm items remain the most popular intervention, followed by interest in social events, general information packs and cold home referrals.



“Things have been hard for me so I really appreciate it.”

Elizabeth, 83

3.3 Additional referrals

Additional referrals – neighbours calling in having seen our leaflet, referrals from partners, or respondents to our re-engagement calls – were the source of 35% of all interventions this year.

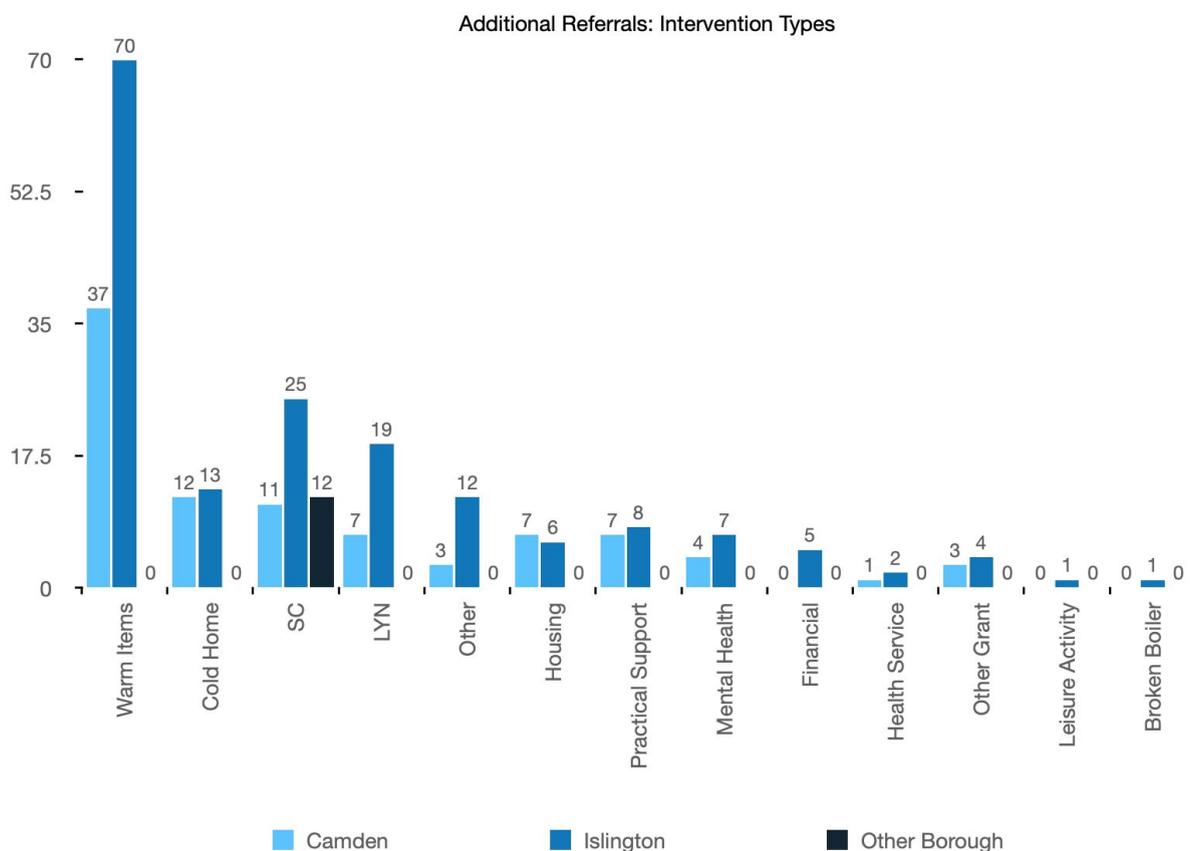
	Camden	Islington	Total
Interventions from re-engagement	21	19	40
Interventions from calls in	75	147	222
Interventions from website referrals	13	52	65
Neighbours receiving an intervention	46	93	139
Total interventions	109	218	327

**A further 14 interventions were made for neighbours outside Camden and Islington, which we referred onto other organisations but have not counted here.*

While warm items, cold home referrals and social connections remained prominent, we found that calls into North London Cares often led to a wider variety of types of support, such as help with housing, mental health and practical support. We believe this is due to the fact that many neighbours feel more comfortable disclosing their needs over the phone, perhaps because they feel more anonymous than during face-to-face conversations.

“I just want to say thank you to North London Cares, without you I would be stuck at home. I really appreciate you all – you're like family.”

Viridon, 71



3.4 Types of Intervention

	Camden	Islington	Total
Warm items	141	226	367 (44%)
Social clubs	37	48	85 (10%)
Cold homes	31	24	55 (7%)
Small grants	16	26	42 (5%)
Social connections	18	23	41 (5%)
WW info pack	18	19	37 (5%)
Other	12	24	36 (4%)
Love Your Neighbour	9	23	32 (4%)

Housing	15	11	26 (3%)
Practical support	13	13	26 (3%)
Social services	5	16	21 (3%)
Mental health	7	10	17 (2%)
Financial advice	4	8	12 (1%)
Other grants	3	6	9 (1%)
Transport	2	5	7 (1%)
Winter Wellbeing	0	4	4 (0%)
Health advice	1	2	3 (0%)
Leisure activities	1	2	3 (0%)
Broken boilers	0	1	1 (0%)
Total	333	491	824

**A further 21 interventions were made outside of our boroughs, which we have not recorded here.*

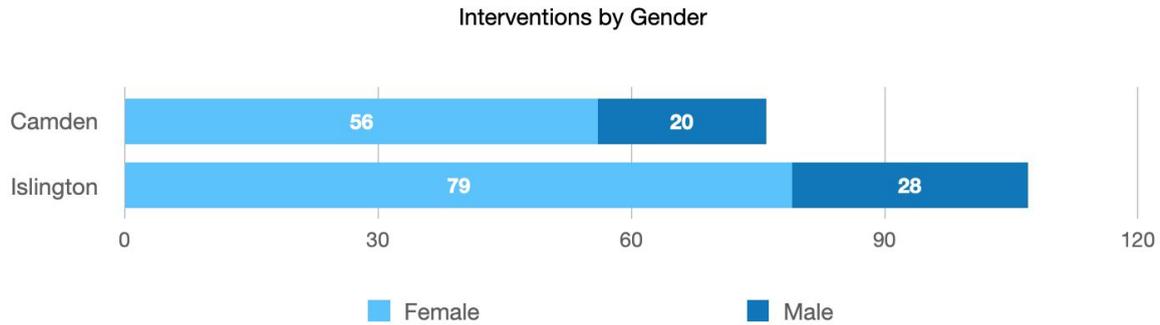
Thanks to generous donations to our Big Give Campaign, we were able to make small grants available again this year. Grants of up to £100 supported neighbours with high heating bills, food costs, or help to buy larger warm items such as heaters and duvets. Of the 42 people who applied or expressed interest in our small grants, we were able to successfully deliver 26 grants (11 in Camden, 15 in Islington).

“I feel I belong at North London Cares. When I wanted to talk to someone there was someone there for me. I like the atmosphere of the social clubs. When I worked, I always had people I could talk to. But when I retired, I became isolated. North London Cares has helped me feel less isolated.”

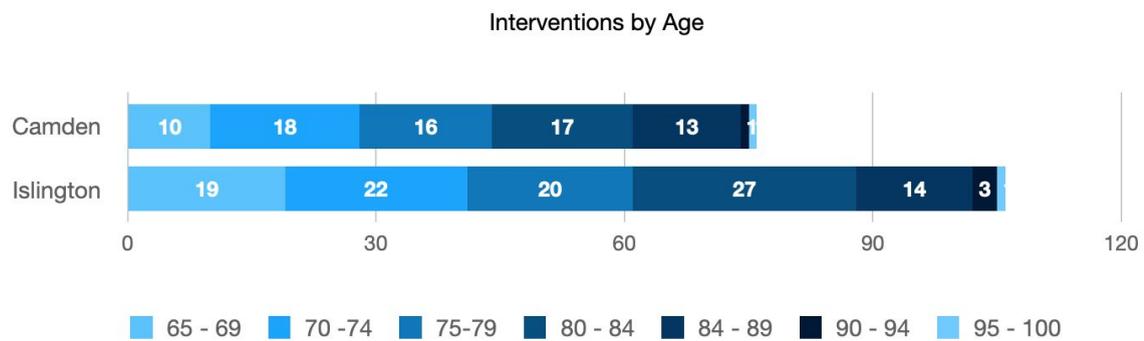
Neville, 80

3.5 Demographics

Where information about gender was given, we recorded the following breakdown amongst people who received interventions:



Where information about age was given, we recorded the following breakdown amongst people who received interventions:



“This is a wonderful project and your team is very helpful – you always call me to check I’m OK. I’m very happy and the support was excellent.”

Meera, 82

4.0 Case studies

Dina*

When Dina called North London Cares, she was having a number of issues with her home: it was very cold and she had pest problems as well as bed bugs, which led her to remove her carpet and get rid of her furniture. Dina lived in a very old property



with lots of draughts and poor insulation (worsened by the recent removal of carpet and curtains). She had been trying to resolve these issues by herself, but explained that she found it very difficult to navigate bureaucratic systems.

The council had been unable to provide her with a carpet and she felt as though she had nowhere else to turn. North London Cares gave her a full pack of warm items and a small grant for a duvet, pillows and bedding, before supporting Dina to apply for a grant from Friends of the Elderly. She later received £300 towards furniture. Dina said these changes made a big difference – and that she is now starting to feel happy, comfortable and warm at home.

“You will be in my memory forever. From the very start we communicated really well. You acted as a real human being and it never felt like you were working, just genuinely helping out. You make people feel at ease and have a massive heart. I would like to meet more people like you with the positive impact you're having on people's lives.”

Dina

John*, 72

We met John door knocking in Camden. He lives alone and has no family or friends nearby. On the first meeting, John told us that he was struggling to heat his home because his bills were so high. John asked for more information about food banks, warm clothes and a small grants assessment. He also told us about various health

conditions and was worried that something might happen to him and no one would be around to support him.

We referred John to WISH+ to help insulate his home, gave him a list of food banks in the area and information and support about getting telecare. We also delivered a hat and socks, as well as £70 in food vouchers. Since the outbreak of Covid-19, we have remained in touch with John, and recently organised a GoodGym delivery to get him some essential food supplies.

“All the staff do a great job and think it's a marvellous idea looking out for people. You found someone to help with shopping which was really helpful.”

John, 72

Tara*

Tara is a regular at our Social Clubs and contacted North London Cares to ask for support with her housing issues, including serious damp, mould and a leaky roof. Her home was very cold and draughty. She had been trying to contact the housing association for months to fix these issues. North London Cares helped to stress the urgency of these repairs and to get a date for repairs, as well as delivering socks, gloves and a coat and scarf in the interim.



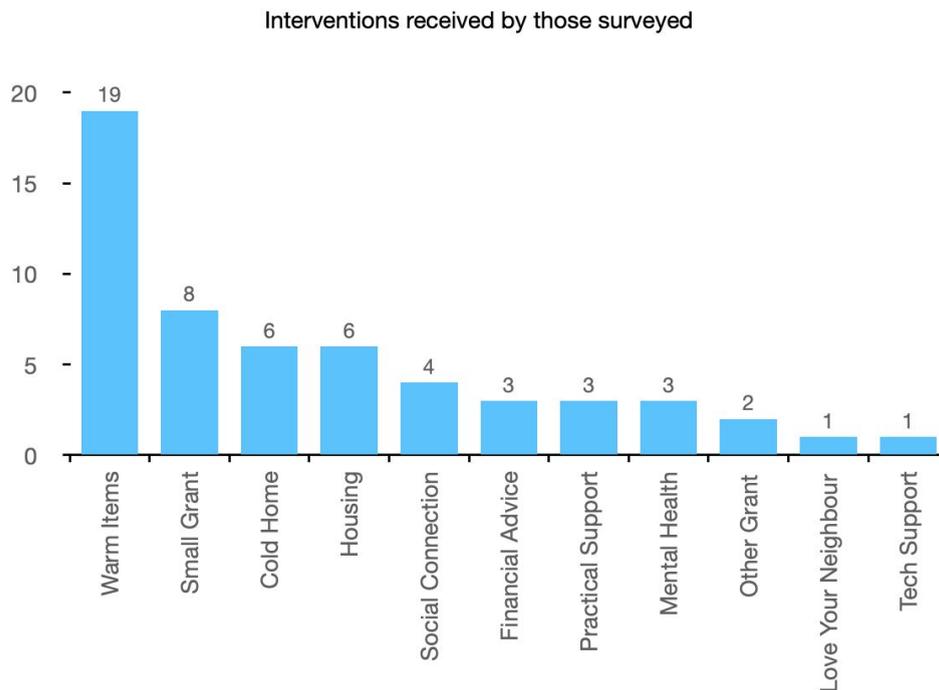
“I'm very, very grateful. Thank you for everything you do.”

Tara

**All Case Study names have been changed*

5.0 Evaluation

5.1 Survey results



Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, North London Cares suspended face-to-face activities on 13th March 2020, though we continued to reach out to potentially isolated older people – indeed with even more intensity due to the fear of isolation that was proliferating. However, some warm items did go undelivered and some interventions that required physical contact were abandoned. We also had to delay evaluation surveys by two weeks.

Instead, surveys took place in mid-May 2020, and excluded neighbours we identified as amongst the most vulnerable or who were feeling extremely anxious about the pandemic (these neighbours joined our regular calls list as part of our Covid-19 response). We did, however, survey 20 older neighbours who had benefited from Winter Wellbeing through a diverse range of interventions, to help us interrogate the successes and gaps in the project. Through the survey:

- 90% agreed or strongly agreed that their original concerns had been addressed;
- 80% felt that the project had improved their health and wellbeing;

- 80% felt that they were now better connected;
- 30% saw improvements in their housing issues;
- 45% said their financial issues had improved.

However, limitations were also highlighted:

- One person felt their issues were more complicated than the support available could solve;
- One person felt that the help they accessed did not resolve their issue;
- One person felt they didn't have any issues to resolve;
- One person can't access many of North London Cares' social clubs because they are too far away;
- One person said the housing association didn't resolve the issues;
- One person didn't follow through with the signposting information we provided;
- One person didn't feel their home was in bad condition.

We also asked neighbours we surveyed, "in your opinion, what is the most valuable aspect of the Winter Wellbeing project?"

- 70% valued the reassurance that the community is there for them;
- 40% valued warm items or financial help;
- 20% valued finding out about social clubs;
- 20% valued signposting to other local services.

“I'm a loner and I don't really want to go to social activities. But I know I can call North London Cares and you'll be there to help me, even though I don't get involved with social clubs. All the people I've dealt with at North London Cares have fallen over themselves to help me, you really put the effort in. WISH+ is also fantastic, I'm glad you referred me to them.”

Rachel, 76

5.2 Project strengths

Now in our ninth iteration of our Winter Wellbeing project, North London Cares continues to benefit from the trust of partners in the community. Securing time at community events was therefore straightforward, and helped us to spread the word about the project. Referral pathways have become more transparent and accessible.

The October launch of Winter Wellbeing allowed us to hit the ground running this year. Planning throughout the summer and off the back of last year's project meant we fitted in 28 different engagements in the first month of project delivery, including flyer drops to pharmacies and flu clinics. This laid the path for more referrals when the weather turned colder.

We have learnt that whilst targeted door-knocking is effective, it's important that this is accompanied by pop-ups in sheltered housing units, and talks in communal spaces, so that neighbours could disclose their concerns in different settings: while some prefer the intimacy of face-to-face visits, others feel encouraged by the informality of a craft activity or dance, or simply tea and a conversation at their local community centre, where neighbours feel safe.

Strengthening partnerships with Islington Bangladeshi Association and Henna's Asian Women's groups opened up doors to new neighbours, and community workers that could translate our messages proved really helpful in supporting us to reach new people, particularly those for whom English is not a first language. Relationships with Calling London, who offered warm coats, also freed up small grant budgets.

This was the second year we committed to knocking on 600 doors, in partnership with Camden and Islington Public Health. That door-knocking is a particularly intensive part of the project, but it enables us to meet neighbours who might not access support elsewhere, such as by attending a day centre. Door-knocking often resulted in meeting neighbours who had been in need of extra support for a very

long time, but had reservations about reaching out for help – perhaps due to distrust of services or simply fear of change, having coped with their situation for a very long time. The face-to-face contact with these neighbours, coupled with kind and non-judgemental conversations, enabled us to connect older neighbors who may otherwise never have sought the vital help they needed.

“It’s good to know that someone always has your back. I feel I’m talking to friends or a neighbour. I bet a lot of people are glad for your support and friendliness.”

Virginia, 77

5.3 Challenges

Winter Wellbeing planning begins well before the launch of the project in October, and our five-year partnership with Camden and Islington Public Health departments means we can now allocate time for data mapping and cross referencing addresses supplied against our database well in advance. Once letters are sent to neighbours, we allow a two week window by which they can opt out of a visit. However, this year we received the initial door-knocking data for our Camden two weeks later than initially scheduled.



We’d planned to start door knocking in mid-November, but starting instead on 2nd December led to repercussions: Camden door-knocking ran into 2020, and the Christmas break meant interventions arising from door knocking in December took longer to complete than we would have liked, leading to a backlog of referrals in January. This time lost meant that we weren’t always able to give the personal touch we take pride in, and which can deepen trust in the community.

Door-knocking is also very labour intensive, and still yields a lower number of interventions. Our Outreach Team is made up of just two members of staff and, for safety, we conduct all door-knocking in pairs. This reduces time spent following up on interventions or answering the many referrals coming in and can create further

log jams. The time door-knocking is also not always well spent: we visit an average of 30 addresses per day, and often find no one home.

Door-knocking can also present the biggest emotional challenges. Staff members are entering the unknown, and can often be met by hostility, distrust, bigotry, complex mental health needs and distressing situations which are beyond North London Cares' remit. We've had to make difficult decisions to raise safeguarding concerns for neighbours we met only briefly. Challenging conversations are frequent, and there is a lot of persuasion needed to encourage neighbors to accept help.

There continues to be a lack of options for neighbours needing shopping and support getting to and from hospital appointments. Dial-a-ride and Plusbus have long waiting lists and it is a challenge to get neighbours immediate support with travel needs.

Language barriers were also an issue again this year, though we benefited on occasion from both members of our team being able to speak some Portuguese and Spanish. We met more Turkish speakers this year, and were unable to convey information about the project on these occasions.

6.0 Recommendations

The Winter Wellbeing project remains unique. North London Cares continues to improve the project year-on-year and to respond to changing contexts including the Covid-19 pandemic – and to learn from our sibling charities across The Cares Family which work in other similar urban environments. However, there are adjustments that can be made to improve the project in future years. We recommend:

- **A reduction in door-knocking** and a different approach to extracting council data, removing sheltered housing units from door knocking data and working with the council to get introductions to SHU managers to go to coffee mornings instead.
- **A different spread of data**, to ensure we visit neighbourhoods we haven't visited previously. Camden data was largely focused in Kentish Town, Gospel Oak and Camden Town, while areas like Somers Town and Regent's Park are underserved.
- **Re-evaluating "opt-in" letters.** There was little take-up from these and we believe that sending out leaflets encouraging people to call for a chat, rather than to book a visit, would lower the barriers preventing people from reaching out for help. For some people, a formal visit may be off-putting.

- **Re-thinking the offer of warm items.** While these are a powerful tool to often encourage neighbours to seek more support, there is a marginal long-term impact for the amount of time invested.
- **Strengthening relationships with community partners** who serve residents who do not speak English, in order to translate our messaging and reach new people, including people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.
- **Continue to build partnerships with GPs** year-round, supporting them to refer into our programmes as part of social prescribing.
- **Year-round re-engagement calls** to maintain relationships with older neighbours and continue to build trust so that they might approach us more proactively when in need, not just in winter but throughout the year.

7.0 Covid-19 response

On Friday 13th March 2020, North London Cares, along with the rest of The Cares Family, made the difficult decision to suspend all of our face-to-face programmes due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This meant having to suspend some of our planned face-to-face interventions. However, throughout March and into the spring of 2020, North London Cares pivoted and intensified our general outreach efforts, in order to help older people who were, all of a sudden, more at risk of social isolation than ever. We worked closely with Camden Council, in particular, to ensure this was a collaborative effort.

Between the 13th and 31st March (the end of the project), North London Cares made **309 calls to 264 older neighbours**, to let them know that our usual face-to-face activities were stopping, but that we were still working hard to help neighbours stay connected in a disconnecting time. In that fortnight, we helped 26 neighbours to access deeper support, including referrals to emergency food and help accessing their pension.



To adapt to the pandemic, North London Cares recalibrated our programmes in the following ways:

- **Social Clubs** – in normal times, our social clubs are group activities bringing older and younger neighbours together to share time, laughter and new experiences. Sessions include our much-loved dance parties, new technology workshops, choirs, Desert Island Discs nights and so much more. These have now become Virtual Social Clubs – quizzes, group yoga sessions, history groups, discussion groups and more. We're aware that only about 40% of the older people we work with have smartphones or WiFi at home – so we've also developed ways that people can call into these clubs from their landlines too.



- **Love Your Neighbour** – in normal times, this programme brings together older and younger people to share time and friendship one-to-one, often in people's homes. Friends share meals, games, company and companionship, bringing a little of the outside world in for people who can struggle to get out. Now that all of us are more physically distant, these relationships have moved onto the phones. Long-standing friends like Lauren and Florence are calling one another regularly, including on FaceTime. We're also making new matches between younger and older neighbours who will speak often for the duration of the crisis through our new Phone a Friend project.
- **Outreach** – in normal times, our outreach is how we identify and invite older and younger neighbours to be part of the community. We go to where people are, through door-knocking on local estates; stalls at supermarkets, chemists and GP surgeries; and events at faith groups and community centres. We also exchange referrals with our partners across our neighbourhoods. Winter Wellbeing is the flagship project of our outreach in regular times. Our re-invented Outreach during the pandemic will still focus on those key referral routes to help older neighbours get what they need but will also now include weekly check-in calls from our staff to neighbours most likely to be isolated by the lockdown, as well as deliveries of food and medical supplies where those

are needed.

- **#AloneTogether** – all this reinvented work will be facilitated by our brand new #AloneTogether activities which harness technologies old and new to help neighbours stay connected in a disconnecting time. Every month for as long as the crisis continues, we will invite younger and older neighbours to share poems, games, jokes, recipes and creative arts projects online and by post to offer a little reflection, distraction and connection.

Between March 13th and May 13th 2020, our emergency response projects:

- Supported 386 older neighbours and 142 younger neighbours to connect;
- Made 739 check-in calls through re-invented outreach, to 356 older neighbours in Camden and Islington;
- Brought together 34 older neighbours and 66 younger neighbours to enjoy virtual social clubs;
- Created 19 new Phone a Friend friendships across the generations, leading to 100 hours of shared time;
- Created 1,473 interactions across the generations, creating solidarity in a time of challenge and change and putting older neighbours' emotional resilience to work to support younger Londoners too.

“I really like having you to phone during these last months.”

Helen, 83

8.0 Conclusion

Every year, Winter Wellbeing presents different challenges. Sometimes that is a deep cold snap which intensifies hardship, isolation and excess morbidity; other years it's a rapid deepening of need. This year, clearly, the biggest challenge was the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, which led to increasing fears about social isolation as much as it led to fears of sickness and death.

However, crises have the tendency also to reveal problems that already existed but which we didn't yet know the severity of. The Covid-19 crisis has revealed – and will deepen – the depth of loneliness, isolation, anxiety and mental ill- health in our communities. In early 2020, these challenges placed new strains on the capacity of a small charity.

That capacity – the ability to take time to build trust, to seek quality of relationship rather than quantity alone, and to do so with the human touch that deepens

connection – is key to Winter Wellbeing’s success. In the coming months, as organisations like North London Cares respond to the pandemic and contribute to the recovery, we will need to reappraise the efficacy, practicality and focus of the Winter Wellbeing project which has always been both value adding in itself and a gateway to our other activities, to make sure that our resources are best aligned to our mission of helping older and younger neighbours to find connection in a disconnecting age.



While this report is packed with the power of numbers, it is the power of time, the power of stories and the power of community that truly facilitate our impact. Our response to Covid-19 – coming as it did at the tail end of this project – has taught us much. Due to the intensity of our work during the pandemic, North London Cares will go into 2020/21 with an even deeper understanding of our neighbours’ challenges – some which have arisen during the pandemic, and some which have been latent for years.

We intend to be in a position to engage more neighbours who are trapped behind closed doors, to reach pockets of Camden and Islington we have not yet reached through Winter Wellbeing, to widen diversity, and to continue to explore new methods of outreach to make the most meaningful interventions we can.

We also intend to be in a stronger position to continue to champion the message that older and younger people coming together to form genuine friendships can most powerfully reduce loneliness and bridge generational, attitudinal, digital and cultural divides – and that it is the cultivation of community, rather than the provision of a service, which can best facilitate that value.